My Work Has Caused Major Initiatives and Reforms in New York State Government -- Mark Thiel

1. NYS Child Support Services **split the intake process into two separate procedures --** those for direct **"Applications" versus** those from **"Referrals"** from other social services agencies. **As a result of my research and writing, the agency designed and issued new forms** -- splitting what formerly was one form into **two separate new forms**. The agency then issued **new Administrative Directive Memorandums** containing instructions for the **new procedures**. (Note: while I was writing the "Intake" chapter, many staff members at the agency questioned why I distinguished between Applications and Referrals *at all*.)

2. Child Support workers were **retrained to import existing data** about custodial parents (i.e. applicants) **from other NYS social services agencies, rather than creating new, redundant case files and manually entering data into those files** via keyboarding. This importation of data greatly improved data integrity. It prevents duplication of case files -- and, importantly, it **creates a link** between Child Support Services case files and case files from other social services, such as the department of **Temporary Assistance**, so that when information is updated in **one** record at **one** agency, the case file gets automatically updated at the **other** agencies, as well.

3. Child Support Services undertook a **complete review of all policy documents** that had been issued in the past -- beginning with the documents that I referenced in my writing. NYS then **updated** these policy documents **and reissued** each of them **to reflect references to the current datafields, screens, and locations** in their (very complex) computer system. (**Previously**, those policy documents referred to a computer interface from the 1980s **that no longer existed**.)

4. As a direct result of my work, the **Division of Child Support Services** initiated an intensive review and evaluation of domestic violence policies and procedures to develop best practices for assisting child support clients who are victims of domestic violence. It then **collaborated with the NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence** to **retrain** all NYS child support workers and administrators in matters relating to domestic violence.

5. Child Support Services initiated **a complete review and correction of all code tables** relating to their computer system -- and there are a great number of them **-- because** in the course of my research into policies, procedures, and processes, **I discovered that many child support workers**, when working on case files involving domestic violence, **were protecting the wrong individual:** they were protecting the **perpetrators** rather than the **victims** of domestic violence.

Detailed explanation of #4 and #5, above, regarding domestic violence:

When someone applies for temporary assistance from NYS, if they are raising children alone (i.e. they are a single parent -- and the other parent is absent), the *custodial* parent will be asked whether they are receiving any child support payments from the *absent* parent.

If the answer is "no," then one **requirement** of receiving monetary assistance from NYS is that they must **authorize NYS to locat**e (if necessary) **the absent parent and take him/her to court**, for the purpose of obtaining a court order for child support.

Why is this? Because in the eyes of the State, the custodial parent is applying for financial assistance from New York State while *failing to exploit every possible revenue stream* available to them.

As such, NYS may provide the custodial parent with temporary financial assistance, but it is going to, in effect, try to recoup some of that money from the absent parent, by obtaining a child support order from a court. And the custodial parent who is applying for assistance **must give NYS legal authorization** to find (if necessary) the absent parent, and take him/her to court.

The problem with this? Cases involving domestic violence.

Sometimes, the custodial parent will say that if NYS goes after the *absent parent* in court, the absent parent may retaliate -- violently. In many cases, the *custodial* parents would be put in danger of being **killed** by the *absent* parent.

In such cases, NYS will *still* go after the absent parent -- but will assure the custodial parent (i.e. the person applying for temporary financial assistance) that they will be protected.

"Protected" in what way?

NYS will assure the custodial parent that their physical address, for example, will not appear on any court documents, or anything that the absent parent might see. The custodial parent will be "*unfindabl*e" by the absent parent.

But what I found in the course of my research was that many child support workers were protecting the **wrong party.** They were making the **perpetrator** (I.e. the absent parent) unfindable, while leaving the **victim** (custodial parent) unprotected.

They were doing this by entering wrong codes into case files.

Upon further investigation, I found that in addition to this problem, the code tables themselves were wrong. This meant that, even if the child support worker were entering the "correct" codes into the case file, the codes themselves were *still* wrong.